

# Transformative Sustainability Education: Reimagining Our Future

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# Book Review

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## **Transformative Sustainability Education: Reimagining Our Future**

By Elizabeth Lange

New York, Routledge. 437 pages (paperback)

ISBN: 978-0-367-747060-0 (pbk)

### **Reviewed by:**

Patrick Howard, Cape Breton University

In a world increasingly plagued by environmental crises, Canadian education scholar Elizabeth Lange's *Transformative Sustainability Education: Reimagining Our Future* offers a comprehensive exploration of how education can catalyze positive change towards a sustainable future. Published by Routledge as a part of the Research and Teaching in Environmental Studies Series, Lange's book emerges as a timely resource for educators, graduate students, and policymakers in environmental and sustainability education and for anyone concerned with the urgent need for transformative action in the face of environmental degradation.

Lange's project is an ambitious one. Her approach is to embark on a deep critical analysis of the evolution of environmental thinking down through time. While the book can feel weighty in the scope of the analysis which can seem compressed, Lange does try to pull the reader back to the central trope of the book that is a Berryian call for a 'new story' for education on which to create a sustainable and life-giving future. This critical deep dive tills rich soil and builds toward Lange's core premise that coalesces most effectively in the last chapter titled "Our Great Work: Reimagining Education and Our Future" that echoes the work of the late eco-theologian and philosopher Thomas Berry.

The book is organized around 8 chapters over 437 pages. The early chapters serve as a comprehensive survey of the story of the permutations of environmentalism across

time and provides a framing of shifting critical and cultural understandings and positionings of environmental education. Lange leads the reader through historical contexts that birthed the conservation movement in the 19th century to environmentalism, sustainability education, sustainable development and the emergent approaches to transformative sustainability education informed by life-values (McMurtry, 2002) and relational ontologies characterized by epistemic orientations that reflect humility, wisdom, and reciprocity. According to Lange, education must be at the centre of our societal recast of a new story and our deep commitment to right relations with the Earth and with each other. Lange is unequivocal in her assessment that this re-storying "...will require much unlearning and relearning" (p. 336).

At its core, *Transformative Sustainability Education* seeks to redefine the role of education in addressing sustainability challenges. Lange argues that conventional approaches to sustainability education fall short, focusing on imparting knowledge rather than fostering the values necessary for transformative change. One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its emphasis in Chapter 6 on the interconnectedness of social, environmental, and economic systems set against New Science, relational ontologies, and a quantum worldview. Lange adeptly navigates complex theoretical frameworks and historical analysis, grounding them in thoughtful interpretation and demonstrating how they provide insight into our cultural challenges that manifest in diverse contexts. By highlighting the intersectionality of issues such as climate change, social justice, and biodiversity loss, Lange underscores the importance of adopting a systems thinking approach to sustainability education—one that recognizes the inherent complexity and interdependence of global challenges.

Throughout the book, Lange demonstrates a deep commitment to inclusivity and diversity in sustainability education. She emphasizes the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives, knowledge systems (particularly those of Indigenous philosophies and ancient wisdom traditions) into educational practices, challenging readers to confront issues of power, privilege, and marginalization within the field. By centering marginalized voices and narratives, Lange advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to sustainability education—one that acknowledges and addresses the structural inequalities that perpetuate environmental injustice and serve as barriers to undertaking the great work that is before us.

*Transformative Sustainability Education* is not a theoretical treatise but a roadmap for anyone interested expanding their understanding of our current situation and how a critical conscientization can be developed through a nuanced deconstruction of how the Western cultural, social, religious, and economic project has been responsible for the precipice on which we collectively stand as inhabitants on this fragile and finite planet. The research is robust and the depth and breadth of the references that follow each chapter are impressive and point to seminal as well as emerging scholars pushing our understanding across transdisciplinary boundaries.

Central to Lange's vision of transformative sustainability education is the concept of re-animating the Earth reminiscent of the works of earlier others including Stephan Harding (2006); David Michael Kleinberg-Levin (2008), David Abram (2010) and Anne Primavesi (2000; 2004). Each in their own way speak to Lange's pluriversal, cosmological, relational, participatory horizons and the re-sacralizing and reimagining of our place in this world. Primavesi and others pointed us toward just this type of individual, social, biophysical and expressive structural coupling of humans to the Earth through the complex interplay of social, linguistic, religious, political, imaginative and emotional dimensions of being human. Lange weaves these and other rich and diverse eco-philosophical and phenomenological threads together for education ways that have not been done before in such an expansive and comprehensive way.

As *Transformative Sustainability Education* picks up these similar threads and weaves them for education, the author offers a compelling vision for the future of education. This is not without its challenges; Lange acknowledges the systemic barriers that often hinder efforts to implement transformative pedagogies. In the final chapter she returns to the beginning, to the "seeds of hope" (p.1) planted down through the ages through ancient practices that live within us and with the right kind of education can be re-animated, grow, and flourish to point us in a different direction - a direction of renewal, repair and relation.

In conclusion, Elizabeth Lange's *Transformative Sustainability Education: Re-imagining Our Future* is a groundbreaking contribution to the field of environmental and sustainability education. Through its rigorous analysis, practical insights, and inspiring vision, the book challenges readers to rethink the purpose and potential of education in addressing the most pressing challenges of our time. Lange offers a path forward towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. For educators, policymakers, and concerned

citizens alike, *Transformative Sustainability Education* is essential reading—a call to action to reimagine the future of education and our collective responsibility to shape a more just and sustainable world.

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